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# **TOURISM DEVELOPMENT AS A CHANGE AGENT IN COMMUNITY ATTITUDES TOWARD THE NATURAL ENVIRONMENT**

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## **ABSTRACT**

Tourism is an age-old phenomenon, but it has received serious research attention only during recent years. In the 1960's, it received special attention as an instrument of economic development. In the next decade the socio-cultural aspects of tourism were examined and, in the 1980's a systematic or holistic treatment of the subject became the focus of cutting-edge research. At a 1982 meeting of the European Center for Research and Documentation in Social Sciences (the Vienna Center) held in Bratislava, Czechoslovakia, plans for a major international social science project on tourism were formally introduced. Resulting from this meeting was the formulation of hypotheses, the identification of appropriate research methodologies, and the design of survey instruments. Research teams from seven countries (Bulgaria, Hungary, Poland, Spain, United Kingdom, United States, and Yugoslavia) were brought into the project to initiate phase one; the testing of instrumentation, collection of baseline data, and preliminary cross-cultural comparison. The Vienna Center held nineteen general conferences with the final gathering in 1989 in

Llangollen, Wales where the phase one findings were presented and discussed.

National teams published their findings within their respective countries, and Annals of Tourism Research also reported on the project and its preliminary findings (12). In addition, the World Tourism Organization extended an invitation for the findings of the study to be reported in two of its conferences held in 1989 in Trinidad and Tobago and in Algeria. At the Llangollen meeting, project participants and the director of the Vienna Center endorsed continuation of the project as a longitudinal (or diachronic) study. Phase two of the project was subsequently initiated and selected researchers from Canada, Germany, the Netherlands and Japan were given the opportunity to join the international project team. This paper presents the Phase two findings of the Canadian project team for what has come to be known as the Tour Project.

The Tour Project is a multidisciplinary research effort which contributes to an increased understanding of the social impacts of recreational travel and tourism. It is believed by many proponents of tourism that the interaction of hosts with

guests promotes environmental appreciation, cultural exchange, international understanding and world peace. Detractors would argue that tourism promotes environmental degradation, social and cultural decay, individual exploitation, and disorganizing behavior. Whatever position we choose to favor, it is important for us to understand the relationship of social attitudes to behaviors that influence the management of the physical environment, so that both negative environmental impacts and negative social impacts can be minimized and the positive effects of tourism on the environment and society can be enhanced.

## REVIEW OF LITERATURE

The tourism literature documents evidence of social and cultural change resulting from tourism development and activity. This change occurs in almost every environment touched by tourists and has been measured in high tourism destinations like Hawaii (13), Florida (16, 19) and California, as well as in other sites around the world (1, 4, 7-11, 14, 15, 17, 18). Canadian studies include those by Brayley and Var (2), Powell (21), and Richardson (23). In reviewing the literature, it becomes clear that earlier socio-cultural studies on tourism are limited in both number and scope. It is also clear that no cross-cultural/cross-national longitudinal studies have been attempted. The Vienna Center's efforts to study the socio-cultural changes induced by tourism have also been discussed in the literature. The Tour Project has been reviewed by leading academicians with respect to its conceptual foundation, methodological adequacy and theoretical contribution (3, 5, 6, 12, 22). Recommended modifications to the methodology (20) have been made and an

Occasional Paper on the Tour Project has been published by the International Social Science Council (24) for support literature.

## METHODS

The results presented here are baseline comparisons in the first stage of a longitudinal study. The study involves the collection of data from samples in two Canadian sites (Cranbrook, British Columbia where tourism is a major industry, and Thompson, Manitoba where it is not) at three points in time (1992, 1996, 2001). The two study sites are similar in size, growth rate, demographics, and economic potential. The data provide for the testing of several hypotheses which facilitate empirically based association of tourism development and activity with changes in social structure, changes in value orientation, changes in attitudes toward cultural inheritance, changes in attitudes toward the environment, and changes in cultural perception. A 63-item questionnaire was administered by telephone interview to a random sample of 250 adult residents in each of the tourism and industrial sites. This method of data collection was chosen to allow for comparability in future cross-cultural analyses. The survey instrument consisted of core items which measured attitude toward the family, attitude toward cultural inheritance, attitude toward the environment, and characteristics of the reference group. Other items measured occupational structure, family structure, values with respect to competition and cooperation, social behaviour, attitude toward the community, and tolerance of other groups.

Several analyses of the data were conducted. Datasets from each study site were first

analyzed independently of the other and then in relation to it. Basic frequencies and cross-tabulations were used in describing the patterns of observations. Bi-variate analyses were conducted in order to describe the effect of socio-demographics on respondents attitudes towards tourism development. Analyses of variance and t-tests were also employed in identification of differences in perceptions of socio-cultural impact according to relevant respondent characteristics. Multiple regression analysis was used to identify and test predictors of individual levels of host community support for various aspects of tourism. Specifically, this paper focuses on the measurement, through analysis of a set of 15 variables, of changes and differences in attitudes toward the environment.

## RESULTS

The first hypothesis was that tourism development is related to the inhabitants' awareness of the community's environmental limits. In both items used to test this hypothesis, tourist community residents and industrial community residents differed significantly ( $t=5.73$ ,  $p<.000$ ,  $df=479$ ;  $t=-3.34$ ,  $p<.001$ ,  $df=460$ ). Residents of the tourist community believed that, in recognition of the limited ability of the environment to be sustained without intervention, they would be more willing to help clean up the natural environment. Neither tourist communities nor industrial communities agreed with the suggestion of limiting tourism or industrial expansion in order to protect the natural environment, and tourist community residents were especially less supportive of the idea.

The second hypothesis was that tourism development is related to the inhabitants' awareness of the need for environmental

protection. While both communities disagreed with reducing the number of new or expanded industrial firms or tourist markets as a means of environmental protection, they did agree that quality of the natural environment was related to quality of life, that the natural environment should not be sacrificed to community development, that business should pay an environmental tax, and that a subject on environmental protection should be included in the public school curriculum. Residents of both communities agreed that simply reducing the quantity of industrial firms/tourist markets is not enough to protect the natural environment, rather it is more important that there be an orientation toward quality environmentally sensitive industrial/tourism development. Interestingly, residents of the industrial community felt more strongly than did their tourism site counterparts ( $t=-3.46$ ,  $p<.001$ ,  $df=472$ ) that factories should be forced to invest in pollution control equipment even if it means salaries would have to be temporarily reduced.

The third hypothesis was that tourism development is related to the inhabitants' personal involvement in environmental protection. There was minimal participation by residents of either community in environmental protection activities such as donating money, time or personal service to the cause, or protesting against practices or products which harm the natural or historically significant natural environment. Residents of the tourist community were more involved in donating money for the restoration of historically significant environments ( $t=2.08$ ,  $p<.038$ ,  $df=495$ ), and in protesting their destruction ( $t=2.35$ ,  $p<.019$ ,  $df=494$ ) but were less favorably disposed to participating in boycotts against products which pollute ( $t=3.54$ ,  $p<.000$ ,  $df=494$ ).

## DISCUSSION

In a time when sustainable development and environmental sensitivity are important political watchwords, and the resort and commercial recreation industry continues to be required to defend itself against charges of producing negative social and environmental impacts in host communities, it is essential that tourism researchers and interested parties be able to ascertain the type of influence that the presence of a tourism industry has on local attitudes toward the environment. The results of this study demonstrate the increased sensitivity of residents of tourism communities in recognizing environmental limitations and in acting to protect the environment. The

presence of tourism as opposed to other industrial activity appears to help develop or sustain attitudes and behaviors that reverence the natural environment.

This study represents an important contribution to our understanding of the interrelated social/environmental impact of tourism. As the longitudinal aspect of the study develops, it will continue to contribute significantly to our understanding of tourism's impact on social-cultural and environmental change within a community. Finally, when compared with parallel studies conducted in other countries, cross-cultural perspectives on the issues surrounding social/environmental impacts will also become clearer.

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